

A large, weathered wooden pulley with a metal chain is the central focus on the left side of the image. The background shows a vast, choppy sea under a cloudy, overcast sky. The overall tone is industrial and maritime.

Spinning Twinning

– How to Take
your Twin City
Relations to the
Next Level



Kommunförbundet Skåne



Swedish Institute.

What kind of brochure is this?

This brochure has been produced as an inspirational tool for people working in municipal organizations dealing with twin city cooperation. It consists of ideas, thoughts and experiences gained during the project Spinning Twinning, as well as some specific advice on the future of twin city cooperation. All content is to be considered as consisting of general remarks and as valid for twin city work even outside the Baltic Sea Region.

Background

In Sweden today the interest in maintaining twin city relationships is on the decrease. In other countries around the Baltic Sea the situation is sometimes the opposite, with many cities wishing to establish new relationships.

“There is very much to learn from each other and twin city cooperation brings us closer and strengthens our bonds, so we will be able in future to plan meetings and carry out exchanges. So I think that twinning is as good as we can make it, the more we are willing to offer, the more we get out of it.” Raivis Luks, Dobele

Many established relationships between cities have also reached a level where only very few meetings actually take place. Many Swedish municipalities are discussing whether to end their twinning agreements, though few do so, since this would entail their breaking up long-standing personal relations with those in the twin city.

“Such relationships can be very important. It is up to the partners to keep them important and to fill them with content. Otherwise, it is better to end them. Not all relationships work equally well. It is perhaps better to consider which ones are worth putting energy into”. Tomas Petersson, Staffanstorp

To cope with this situation the idea behind Spinning Twinning was to work towards a more strategic and project oriented relationship, using

the relationships as a basis for modern development cooperation around issues important to both sides.

“In my opinion Twin City cooperation has taken on another meaning today, compared to when we entered into the agreement 20 years ago. Today we still consider it as a way of support and contribution. It has been meaningful for the receiver for many years, but today our twin cities can manage by themselves.

Today they want to meet us on an equal level based upon the same conditions. A mutual development of experiences is needed for them. We have the same type of problems.” Jan Lundmark, Simrishamn

What was Spinning Twinning?

Spinning Twinning was a 18 month long development project led by the Association of Local Authorities in Skåne – Kommunförbundet Skåne – which is an interest-based organisation for all 33 municipalities in the region of Skåne in southern Sweden.

The project, which was co-financed by Swedish institute, lasted from spring 2011 to summer 2012.

We wanted to carry out a “project development project” together with 7 of the 33 municipalities in the region of Skåne and their respective twin cities in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

Which were the objectives of Spinning Twinning?

The overall aim of Spinning Twinning was to vitalize the twin city agreements of the participating municipalities.

Furthermore, the objective was to contribute to the rising of the number of fruitful projects in the Baltic Sea Region. These should be projects targeting mutual development needs. The goal was to work with a number of new project ideas which, after the project ended, would result in at least five completed applications, to EU-programs or other national or international funders.

The third objective was to raise general awareness concerning the role of the Baltic Sea Region.

Finally, the experiences and lessons learned from the project were to be disseminated, mainly through this brochure.



Who participated in Spinning Twinning?

From Swedish side the following municipalities participated together with their twin cities in Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

- Hörby and Pyrzyce in Poland
- Kristianstad and Siauliai in Lithuania
- Lund and Zabrze in Poland
- Osby and Kretinga in Lithuania
- Simrishamn and Palanga in Lithuania
- Staffanstorp and Wolin in Poland
- Ängelholm and Dobeles in Latvia

Why Spinning Twinning?

The participating municipalities have felt the need to vitalize relations and in many places there has, at the same time, not been any initiating force for carrying this out.

The idea was to use already established contacts to increase the number of development projects based on mutual areas of interest in the Baltic Sea Region. Thus, Spinning Twinning can be seen as a part of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

What happened during Spinning Twinning April 2011 – August 2012?

The participating municipalities were guided through the whole process, from the discussion of the current status of the partnership relations, through analyses of needs, to generating of projects and the spreading of knowledge about suitable EU-programs which are appropriate as potential funders.

The project management continuously pushed the process forward and with the help of e-mail contacts and other measures of support, ensured a smooth, uninterrupted flow between the physical meetings, that the project arranged and financed.

Spinning Twinning carried out three major activities:

A three day meeting in Simrishamn in Skåne in June 2011, which laid the foundations for the whole project. During the meeting discussions were held and lectures were given on the project's themes: the changed conditions for twin city cooperation; the role of the Baltic Sea strategy as connected to our mutual history and identity; and methods of project development. A workshop was also held to generate and spark practical ideas.

Between June and December 2011 the participating municipalities continued to develop their project ideas with support from the project management.

A four day meeting in Vilnius in November 2011 functioned as a qualified “writing workshop”. Applications were written, suitable EU – or other funds were identified and time frames for the continued work between the participating municipalities were decided and documented.

Results

In May 2012 six applications to EU-funds had been approved.

Conclusions

All participating municipalities were convinced of the benefits of using authentic development needs and receiving support the whole way through a project’s life cycle: from vision to submitted application.

“There is too much idle talk and not enough happening. The traditional relations at just the political level are not enough. We must think more strategically and use the opportunities the relationships can give us to strengthen our mutual development.” Kristina Prahł, Kristianstad

In the following we have summarized the statements from the participants in order to provide some advice on how to vitalize twin city relationships.

What is important to consider when developing the twin city relationships into modern municipal development work?

One identified success factor in developing the twin city relationships is connected to the organization structure of the municipality.

“It is good to have an internal network, consisting of civil servants working with international issues, within the municipality.” Kristina Prahł, Kristianstad

To have a centrally placed committee deciding about international work is another good idea. In this committee, politicians from both the ruling



majority and the opposition should meet regularly, together with the leading civil servants. This is a way to secure the chain of command which is needed, if the idea of working with important issues together with a twin city, is to reach all levels in municipal departments.

“Consider twin city relations as a part of all other municipal work. Treat it the same way. It cannot live by itself. It should be considered as all other municipal work based upon the goals of the municipality.” Kristina Prah, Kristianstad

“We have a relatively informal way but it works. There is a consensus between majority and opposition in these issues and that makes sure that it will not turn into party politics. I keep both sides informed all the time.” Tomas Petersson, Staffanstorps

It is also important to organize the physical meetings between the twin cities not only as formal meetings but also to allow for specialists to sit down and discuss the important issues they face in their everyday work.

“One easy way of vitalizing them could be to adjust the programs when we meet. Instead of just formal talks we could divide specialists within different fields into groups, just letting them tell each other what is hap-

pening in their respective municipality connected to the mutual areas of interest. All partners would then learn a lot.” Yvonne Kvist, Osby

“Make sure that programs have space for spontaneous activities. In relaxed situations people dare to ask questions they would never ask in more formal contexts. Make the programs more relaxed.” Irene Nyqvist, Hörby

“It is important to really think in depth beforehand, about the program for the twin city activities, so we can invite the relevant people in order to identify which areas to be discussed. We must really question what the purpose is of every meeting.” Wiveca Britzén, Ängelholm

One important factor is to have relevant documents describing the strategy of the municipality on international issues.

“Make sure that the relationship is at an adequate level. Do not produce any broad strategic documents that cannot be realized. Be politically realistic. Strategic documents must be realistic. We have a policy on international cooperation which is at a realistic, achievable level.” Yvonne Kvist, Osby



The importance of having good relationships at personal level was stressed several times during the discussions:

“You must develop some kind of friendship to start upon. If there are no areas of socialising it is hard to cope with development issues. The importance of the personal relationship must be highlighted.” Tomas Petersson, Staffanstorp

Advice

- Develop a structure in your own organisation where a committee consisting of politicians from all parties and leading civil servants are responsible for the international work
- Create an internal network to support the implementation of the international work at department level
- Arrange the meetings so people really discuss important development issues
- It is a success factor if the mayors are able to communicate directly without interpreters and develop a close relationship
- Try to save space in all programs for informal talks
- Consider which relations are worth maintaining and focus on them
- Start discussions around concrete development work
- Provide practical support for developing project applications
- Use EU- funding to finance the development work

What is needed in order to develop twin city relations towards modern municipal development work?

In most cases lack of money is not the main obstacle. Rather, other types of resources are needed, for example an open attitude at all municipal levels towards this work.

“A strong political support is essential. I think that the politicians must consider their own role. Are they involved in the relation or not? It ought to be only interested and devoted politicians involved, otherwise it will not lead to anything. Those engaged must be open and interested. If you bring politicians, do not choose them because of their position (maybe with the exception of the mayor) but based on their degree of interest. In doing so their interest will spread to others.” Irene Nyqvist, Hörby

“Personal interest among the politicians is also very important. There must be some leading politicians who carry the responsibility. They do not necessarily have to belong to the municipal executive committee. Interest may also occur at other levels, but there have to be leading actors.

Ideas must also come from people working at department levels. The people that have the ideas must be prepared to fight for them.” George Heuwing, Lund

It is also important that all municipal organizations wishing to develop their twin city relation must provide a support function – someone who can give advice to other colleagues who are willing to put some energy into this job. The importance of providing time resources must be stressed.

“It is important to have civil servants who are brave enough to try testing new ideas. It is important that there is support from senior advisors with experience. The use of lobbying is a must at civil servant level. To have a supportive function for those with brave ideas, is one factor leading to success.” Irene Nyqvist, Hörby

“Someone in the organization must continuously make sure that at least once a month, dialogue takes place by phone or on Facebook. You can never allow dialogue to reach a standstill because it will then be much harder to pick up. It is easier to maintain the relationship by a phone call once a month to just get some updated information about what is going on.” Tomas Petersson, Staffanstorps

In many municipalities the whole process with twin city relationships depends on a few devoted individuals: politicians or civil servants.

“To have devoted individuals is a criteria for success. These individuals must also have supportive leaders – all the way up. A devoted individual needs co-partners in the workplace – colleagues who can share the workload.” George Heuwing, Lund

However, all this is not enough. To be able to carry out the development of a twin city relationship, a great deal of anchoring at all levels in the municipality is needed, from the highest levels, down to the individuals working at department levels.

It is also important to have some kind of structure providing continuity for the twin city cooperation.

“The success is related to some mandate given through documented political decisions. Without this mandate and authority no one dares to take decisions. This is as important all the way through, at the administrative levels. To a large extent it is a question of individuals. The ones who will run the project must create enthusiasm in others in order for the project to be successful. It must be a person dedicated and able to spread ideas.” Jan Lundmark, Simrishamn

“The civil servants dealing with this must have legitimacy. To have the right attitude at top administrative level is important. We have a chain of command making it possible to transfer the positive attitude further down in the organization.



There must be a good, nourishing soil abundant in the organization proclaiming it is ok to think outside the box, a flexible attitude to new things. The absolute key factor is that the citizens are involved through activities.” Irene Nyqvist, Hörby

“The operative levels in the municipality must first agree upon participation. It cannot begin with a decision from above because that will not really find its place in the operative organizations.” Wiveca Britzén, Ängelholm

Advice

- Make sure that there is political support from the very top
- Document this political support
- Make sure that practical ideas of cooperation are anchored at operative level at the departments and not only at political top level
- Have a clear chain of command for executing the political decisions

What are the cultural aspects to consider in twin city development?

Working with twin city relations continuously confronts us with various interesting situations, based upon cultural differences. Most people however find such contrasts positive as they are in fact the core value behind the idea of the whole project:

“If we did not want to experience them, we could stay at home.” Irene Nyqvist, Hörby

“The cultural differences among twin cities are inevitable. You should not fear them , they form the basis of mutual contacts, awakening curiosity and willingness to meet partners.” Ryszard Banaszekiewicz, Wolin

The best way of coping with the cultural differences seems to be to adopt the saying: “When in Rome do as the Romans do”. Meaning we

cannot expect our friends to change their habits when we meet them and we should not change ours when they visit us.

“It is important to discuss with each other and pass on basic information, in order to be prepared to understand things which we might not grasp at first glance. Focus on the importance of getting to know each other as persons.” Tomas Petersson, Staffanstorp

Another way of handling cultural differences is to ask questions. Ask all questions that are needed so as not to create a barrier. Be honest and open, so that there is no risk of misunderstandings. Make sure that you have all the information you need, before entering a meeting just to be on the safe side and to avoid the risk of misunderstanding or being misunderstood.

“A lot of the problems we face are due to lack of communication, unwillingness to say that you do not understand and lack of knowledge. Often you are not secure in your communication and the use of an interpreter all the time is not possible. Often you get the feeling that they understand but they have actually not done so. If this situation is connected to pride, it will create problems.” Jan Lundmark, Simrishamn

Twin city relationships are similar to old friendships and you could act as if they were in fact a relationship between old, close friends.

“Dealing with cultural differences is all about trust and respect. You must meet the individuals in order to reach trust. After this trust has been reached, you can discuss organizational issues etc.” Jan Lundmark, Simrishamn

“We must learn to bring up issues that are slightly negative. If you have a secure relationship it must also be able to handle elements that are not only positive.” Yvonne Kvist, Osby

Advice

- The cultural differences are the main outcome in themselves

- It is up to you to ask questions in order to feel comfortable on all occasions, where cultural differences occur
- Remember that you are dealing with a friend. To a friend you can say things that are not only positive in order to strengthen your relationship

Summarized strategic advice for driving your twin city cooperation towards modern municipal development work.

- The instructions to the civil servants must be clear: Twin city cooperation must consist of real development work.
- If there are political changes in one or both of the twin cities the need for political anchoring is more important. The mayors must be on track.
- The politicians should be open to suggestions coming from the civil servants.
- Encourage and support ideas coming from people working at department levels.
- Appoint a responsible civil servant for twin city relations with support from the superior levels.
- Have very distinct anchor strategy in both your own and in the twin city's organization, in order to succeed with projects.
- Keep regular contacts by phone or via internet.
- Do not try to keep up a twin city relationship if there is no real substance.
- Involve the citizens through activities.
- People are very important in twin city cooperation. Their commitment, creativity and wish to broaden their horizons and gain extensive knowledge about functioning of other nations, are important.
- Use the EU-program Europe for Citizens to develop your relationships. The financing can make it possible to arrange

meetings where you can discuss development issues.

- Consider twin city relations as a part of all other municipal work. Treat it the same way. It cannot live by itself. It should be considered as all other municipal work based upon the goals of the municipality.
- Working with different types of people, try to avoid prejudices concerning other colleagues' ability to work in this field. Do not be afraid of bringing other peoples' ideas in to the table.



Photos: Municipality of Simrishamn, Wiveca Britzén and Raivis Luks

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